Blue Ridge Fest and Mayfest bring out thousands

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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PICKENS — Who doesn't love a good festival on a warm, spring evening?

Thousands of people flock to the Blue Ridge Fest in Pickens and Mayfest in Walhalla each year and for 2011, the next two weekends will be packed with entertainment and fun.

This weekend, downtown Walhalla will transform into a certified hot spot for festival-goers, as Mayfest begins at 11 a.m. today and 8 a.m. tomorrow.

The 10th annual event will feature numerous vendors, specializing in unique crafts and breathtaking art.

In addition to the barbecue and other tasty food options, live music will be featured until 6 p.m. each night on the green next to Arby's.

"We've always looked forward to this festival because it's within walking distance to our home and it's a lot of fun," said Kelly Kisher, Walhalla resident. "We moved here in 2001 and that was the first year of the festival. It's grown a lot since then. By the time we get home on Saturday night, we're exhausted. Plus, there is something about going to a local festival that just makes you feel good. We're fans of that."

Following close on the heels of the first weekend of family fun in Walhalla, May 13 and 14 brings Blue Ridge Fest to Pickens. The popular event is slated to attract tens of thousands of people over the two-day period.

The driving force behind this event each year is centered on giving back to the community. The money raised has increased exponentially since its inception and this year, Amy Childress, representative for the festival, said it's going to be even bigger.

"We have given over $1.2 million to charities over the last 13 years," Childress said. "This is a night of great fun for the family and while enjoying the evening you can feel great knowing you are helping your fellow community members. Giving back to the charities is what the Fest is all about. We also have some of the greatest entertainment this year by bringing Chubby Checker to the stage. It promises to be a great night of classic cars and fabulous entertainment."

Charities that are benefiting this year are the Anderson Free Clinic, Anderson Interfaith Ministries, Golden Corner Food Bank, Haven of Rest Ministries, Helping Hands of Clemson, Hidden Treasure Christian School, Oconee Presbyterian Service Fund, Pickens County Meals on Wheels, Rosa Clark Medical Clinic Association, Sabrina House Children's Charity, Samaritan Health Clinic of Pickens County, SHARE Sunbelt Human Advancement Resources and United Christian Ministries.

Denise McCormick, representative from Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative, said last year alone the employees raised more than $150,000.

"This is a very special time for us," McCormick said.

The entertainment line up is tremendous, she added, stating that the Friday night beach cruise-in will feature Jim Quick and Coastline as well as the iconic Chubby Checker.

"We have people come year after year for them," she added. "We bring them back because people love them."

While the music will be great to listen to, visitors are encouraged to get on the floor and dance, especially to do the twist when the world-renowned Chubby Checker takes the stage.

"We're going to have a contest and someone will be leaving with $500," McCormick said.

Saturday's Charity Motorcycle Ride will start at the Pickens equipment facility at 9 a.m. Following a 100-mile ride, bikers will return to the co-op for Biker Bingo and prizes.

There are also two prize drawings for $5,000 cash on Friday night and a 2011 Polaris Ranger XP 800 UTV and trailer on Saturday. Raffle tickets are $5 each and can be purchased at any Blue Ridge Electric or Blue Ridge Security offices, by phone at (800) 240-3400, online at www.blueridgefest.com or at the event.

Tickets to the Blue Ridge Fest are $15 in advance or $20 at the gate. Children 7-12 are $8 and those six years old and younger are free.

"Come out and have a great time with us," Childress said.



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Between Walhalla's Mayfest today and tomorrow and Blue Ridge Fest on Friday, May 13 and Saturday, May 14, people here in the Upstse will have plenty to keep them entertained.

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In addition to the cruise-in at the Blue Ridge Fest, there will be lots of good food, good music, dancing and quality entertainment.